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INTERNATIONAL CONCILIATION

THE EMOTIONAL PRICE OF PEACE



BY

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American Association for International Conciliation

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The Executive Committee of the Association for International Conciliation wish to arouse the interest of the American people in the progress of the movement for promoting international peace and relations of comity and good fellowship between nations. To this end they print and circulate documents giving information as to the progress of these movements, in order that individual citizens, the newspaper press, and organizations of various kinds may have readily available accurate information on these subjects.

For the information of those who are not familiar with the work of the Association for International Conciliation, a list of its publications will be found on page 13.

THE EMOTIONAL PRICE OF PEACE

When Friday tried to indulge his cannibalism, Robinson Crusoe first expressed his abhorrence of such practices. He then, if I remember rightly, made it known to Friday that he would surely kill him if he dug up and ate the body. But he wisely reinforced the sentiment and the threat by demonstrating to Friday the merits of young goat, stewed, broiled and roasted. Whereupon, it is written, Friday of his own initiative decided that he would never eat man again.

Reasonable men are now inoculating their less civilized brethren with the feeling that the settlement of international disputes by violence is abhorrent to honor and justice, and even to enlightened selfishness. They will soon have an international court and police to keep any nation Friday from relapse into wholesale murder, arson and political cannibalism. But it may be useful to make sure also that other tastes are stimulated so that the peace of nations may bring an added zest and richness to life.

It is a nice problem in psychology to measure just what will be lost from human nature when nations have disarmed and war is as discreditable as piracy. It is even more interesting to decide what best to give men to replace their hankerings for the thrills of national revenge and bloodshed.

First, we must separate the effect on the *participants*,—those who, for love of country, love of money or love of excitement, do the killing and orphaning,—from the effect on the *onlookers*. These too must be divided into those who are paying the price of the war-game, wearing their hearts out with the misery it

is bringing to them and their fellow men, and, on the other hand, the deadheads—the “bums”—who neither fight nor suffer, only chuckle because “we lost ten thousand while they lost thirty,” or curse the army that let itself be killed,—who sit in the corner grocery or by the “ticker,” telling how they would have done it! These last, it will appear, are the only losers from peace.

The “born” warrior, the professional soldier, even the fighting sport and adventurer, and all who would by choice participate in wars, will not suffer when wars have gone the way of trial by fire, blood-feud, and piracy. They need not lose one jot or tittle of the joy of living. As international police, serving the international department of justice and correction, they can be happily engaged in preventing outrages by any nation, in taking concealed weapons away from any dishonorable party, in actually putting *hors de combat* any twentieth century Napoleon who may wish to try his might against the right of the civilized world. There will be just about enough war-work for such men.

The onlookers who pay, the mothers, children and friends of those who fight, ask no equivalent emotions for those which war would bring. The excitement, anxiety, terror and endless grief no one, even under the insane obsessions of primitive war-lust, will crave. The pride is only that which will come in purer form and higher degree from any useful service the son or father performs in the world. Indeed, if deprived of the artificial premium of a code of revenge no longer acceptable as honorable or just, war must less and less arouse any patriotic feeling, and more and more be

felt as a mere misfortune of human nature. A son killed in war will be reckoned as a victim to human stupidity, like one hit by a chance shot from a street fight, run over by a careless engineer, or poisoned by ill-inspected meat.

Cheap rhetoric has tried to convince us that the mother's grief is purified into resignation and pride by the knowledge that her boy's life was given to a righteous cause. This insult to every boy and mother on the other side can bring condolence only to a narrow mind, and never when there is a just suspicion that the war was nowise needed for the triumph of the cause.

Men and women are beginning to see the difference between being in the right in a dispute and having a right to go to war over it. If it should be known that Canada had stupidly refused to make reparation of say \$100,000 as stipulated for some violation of a fishery-treaty, we all might agree that our country was in the right, but a majority of sane men would equally agree that our government did not have a right to set a hundred million decent people at war because of the stupidity of certain Canadian officials. A thousand men here and in Canada would promptly offer to pay the fine and save the war. We would no more go to war with Canada for \$100,000 than we would tear the rags from a destitute orphan because her father owed us two cents. We are all learning that a righteous cause is a cause for war only when the wrong done by the war is less than the right it preserves. Nor will there be in the future any such readiness as there has been in the past to assume that the war which someone is interested in stirring up is really in the defense

of national welfare. Just as a hundred years ago men began to suspect that the divine right of kings was merely a money-making device, so to-day they begin to suspect that private interests outweigh the common good in the conflicts of nations. Rightly or wrongly, no mother's blessing will urge her boy on to fight for dollars for the H. O. and G. Trust, or prestige for Mr. D. F., who may happen to be our hired man doing our work as Secretary of State. The thought of a parent on the battle-field for a wily group of property-holders in Mexico arouses no patriotic exultation in even the most unsophisticated child.

The only losers by peace are the deadheads—the bums—who neither fight nor suffer. They lose the cheap excitement of contemplating wholesale murder and of playing with the lives of nations. They are jealous of national dignity because they “like to see a good scrap.” They do not believe in compromise because it is “tame.” They would like to show Germany or Japan what we could do in a war! A war is good to read about while it lasts and to brag about afterward! They seek that extraordinary form of self-respect which comes from belonging to a state that is rich, a city whose baseball team holds the championship, or a nation victorious in war! The ultimate emotional value of war is only as a monstrous dog-fight for them to stare at and talk about. For them alone some substitute for the thrills of war is needed.

It is worth while to seek a substitute for war for even this despicable mob. For we all belong to it. In its cheap enjoyments we all share. There is in us all a lust for the cowardly excitement of looking on at

conflict. This is held down somewhat by a decent regard for the happiness of mankind and by whatever prudent insight we have into the eventual cost of war to our own fortunes. It is choked off somewhat by interests in family, friends, knowledge, beauty and skill. But a little relaxation of the humane habits and tastes which have been laboriously taught us suffices to release it, and we gloat over the game of war. We all relapse easily into shoddy patriotism, esteem ourselves for the skill of "our" generals, swell with pride at "our" army's valor, and appropriate as a personal dignity the heroism of which we read. A slight pretext makes us think that our country's business is to do us credit! By a pitiable excess of stupidity we assume victory as our glory, but credit defeat to a general's folly or a bureaucrat's incompetence. No one of us has fully mastered the first lessons of citizenship,—to think of things as they are, to want the common good, and to act from reason. While we are learning them, we need to beguile ourselves from false national pride and from cheap excitement at vicarious conflict.

To substitute a rational patriotism for self-congratulation at the exploits of a military "team" involves teaching ourselves to take pride in what we have earned and to prize only worthy achievements. Both tasks are hard. By original nature, man exults in all glories which he can connect with himself no matter how adventitiously. By original nature man prizes his advantage over others rather than his absolute welfare.

But the tasks are made needlessly hard by foolish education. School-books, for instance, on page after page teach children to vaunt themselves because this

is a very large country, a very free country, one that had in the past very brave soldiers, and the like. But one has to look long to find any lessons on what boys and girls or men and women do that gives them a share in the country's greatness. A boy is allowed to be more or less ashamed of having been at a small college for which he did something in scholarship or athletics, but to be proud of having been at a large college which did much for him. Instead of thus deliberately pauperizing their patriotism we should teach them to live for, not on, their country's greatness.

A moderate amount of forethought on the part of teachers, editors and preachers would give common habit a turn toward the questions: Is my city proud of having me belong to it? What does America gain because I am an American? We need not at any rate deliberately attach self-congratulation to those situations which properly evoke only humble gratitude, or give systematic lessons in applying to oneself the honor due to another.

More can be done than to release patriotism from being pauperized. We can open the mind to the real nature of citizenship. In so far as boys and girls learn that any act whatever that makes their city or country a better place for good people to live in is an act of good citizenship—that efficient labor, skillful professional service, healthy and noble pleasures are important features of citizenship—they will abandon shoddy patriotism. By seeing that they can give something, they will take pride in giving, will give more, and will regard their country's successes, not as a spectacle for their benefit, but as a business in which they have a share.

The other half of the problem—teaching ourselves to prize only worthy national achievements—is also made needlessly hard by the conventional exaggeration of the litigious virtues which survives as a relic from the days before the discovery of truth, the organization and economy of labor, and deliberate constructive work for human welfare were recognized activities of the state. Just as our arithmetics contain problems that can be traced unfailingly back to the days of barter in Venice in the sixteenth century, so even the best of our school histories is a lineal descendant of the songs sung at war-dances and cannibal feasts.

The best way to teach ourselves to appreciate worthy national enterprises is to engage in them. Interests and emotions are the products as well as the producers of acts. We create zeal by zealous behavior. Let men work together at building the Panama canal and conserving needed forests; at putting an end to malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis, the white-slave traffic and child-labor; at providing employment for all capable and willing workers and education in a trade for every boy and girl able to learn one. They will soon come to feel an honorable pride in their race or nation—pride in what it achieves for its own and the world's good. They will find the game of welfare as interesting as the game of war.

This is not a Utopian solution. The zest for vicarious war, for contemplating the conflicts of military "teams," has lived not so much by its intrinsic attractiveness as by heavy subsidies. Put a million dollars a day into any national enterprise, say a crusade against tuberculosis, and it acquires interest.

Devote a large fraction of literary talent for two thousand years to advertising the adventures of a public-health army, and the career of a hunter of microbes will become attractive. The intrinsic difficulty of arousing interest in exterminating the tubercle bacillus or freeing children from slavery or putting Justice on the throne of industry, may not be greater than that of arousing an equal interest in exterminating the aborigines, or freeing Cuba, or putting a Bourbon on the throne of France.

Suppose that from '61 to '65 we had spent three thousand million dollars in a campaign to free little children from misery in factories and mines. The health, happiness, and education of children would be of public interest. Suppose that since then the pension expense, now over three million dollars a week, had been given up to discovering and helping men of genius to turn their passion for truth and beauty to the world's advantage. We should appreciate the worth of provision by a state for the discovery, conservation and use of its human resources.

Suppose that we now maintained at a cost of two hundred and seventy-five millions a year an army of physicians, men of science and nurses to eradicate tuberculosis. The mere expenditure of what our military establishment now costs us, would make every village church and city club a center of interested discussion of the latest news from the tene-ments!

As a matter of fact, we are, year by year, more rapidly acquiring interests which will protect us against cowardly zest as onlookers at a cock-pit of nations. In their sober senses the plain people of this country

no more hanker after a look at the war-game than they hanker after bull-fights or the trial by fire. Public enterprise is being directed less toward a fretful defense of national prerogatives, and more toward an energetic fight for the inward means of national dignity. The settlement of national disputes by force is doomed to have in the life of reason only the painful interest of a pitiable accident, like the wrecking of a train by an incompetent switchman, or the murder of his family by a maniac.

EDWARD L. THORNDIKE

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. Program of the Association, Baron d'Estournelles de Constant. April, 1907.
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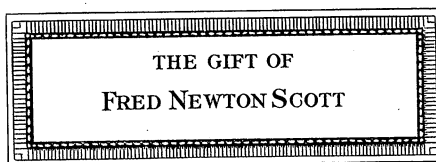
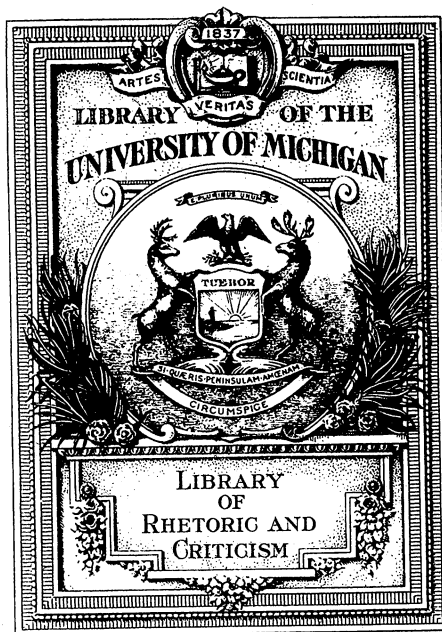
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